

Feeding the School-Age Child

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School years are important ones nutritionally for the child. The child is exposed to new food patterns when he begins eating meals away from home. Group acceptance becomes increasingly important, and food preferences may be influenced by the group to which a child belongs.

Outwardly, the child between 6 and 12 is growing slowly. However, the child should be storing adequate nutrients for the period of rapid growth in adolescence. A well-balanced and adequate diet is essential during the school years.

GROWING SLOWLY

The child between 6 and 10 grows at a relatively slow, steady pace. Following this period, there is an accelerated growth spurt. For girls, growth usually becomes more rapid around 10 to 11; for boys, the growth spurt begins later, about 13 to 15.

An adequate diet is needed throughout the school years to provide building materials for growth and energy for vigorous physical activity. Nutrients, especially protein, are needed to help maintain resistance to infection. The child is in contact with increasingly more persons and chances of exposure to infection are greater. It is also important that the child develop adequate stores of nutrients for the growth and stresses during adolescence.

Nutrient needs for boys and girls under 9 are the same. However, after 9 boys need more food than girls because they are generally more active and have greater muscle development.

A GUIDE TO FOOD NEEDS

During the school years, a child needs the same foods as adults but in different amounts. More of the same foods eaten during the preschool years are needed to supply additional nutrients and calories for the growing child. The size of servings gradually increases during the elementary school years to meet the needs of growing bodies.

A good guide to follow in planning the child's meals as well as the family's meals is the Daily Food Guide. This guide is composed of four food groups:

Food Group	Foods Included	Value in Diet
MILK GROUP	milks cheeses ice creams	Supplies calcium for strong bones and teeth.
MEAT GROUP	meat poultry fish eggs dry beans or peas	Supplies protein which helps build strong, healthy muscles, promotes growth, and helps resist infection.
FRUIT AND VEGETABLE GROUP	citrus fruits dark green and yellow vegetables others	Supplies vitamin C necessary for healthy tissues. Supplies vitamin A for maintaining healthy skin and good eyesight.
BREAD AND CEREAL GROUP	bread cereals noodles	Supply energy. Enriched products supply iron which helps maintain healthy blood. They also supply the B-vitamins which function in maintaining a good digestive tract and help the body use energy from food.

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The amounts of food recommended for school age children are listed below. Because nutrients needs gradually increase throughout these years, there are two age group listings.

Food	Age 6-9	Age 10-12
Milk	2-3 cups	3-4 cups
Eggs	1	1
Meat, fish, poultry	2-3 ounces	3-4 ounces
Potatoes	1 small	1 medium
Vegetables (green leafy or deep yellow)	1/4 cup	1/3 cup
Other vegetable	1/4 cup	1/3 cup
Fruit for vitamin C	1 medium	1 medium
Other fruit	1 medium	1 medium
Cereal	1/2 cup	3/4 cup
Bread	3 slices	3 slices
Butter/margarine		
Additional foods to meet energy needs.		

These foods may be grouped into three meals a day plus snacks.

SCHOOL LUNCH—A NEW EXPERIENCE

There is a new development in the day's meal schedule if a child eats lunch away from home. The lunch should continue to be an adequate meal whether he eats it at home, carries it from home or buys it at school.

The National School Lunch Program reaches most urban and rural schools. This program helps provide children nutritious meals. The pattern for this meal was specified in the National School Lunch act of 1946. A Type A lunch must contain as a minimum the following:

- 1 cup whole milk
- 2 ounces protein food
- 2-3/4 cup servings fruits and/or vegetables
- 1 slice enriched bread
- 2 teaspoons butter/fortified margarine

This lunch provides approximately 1/3 of the day's nutritional needs.

At school the child may come in contact with food patterns different from those accustomed to at home. The child also learns that certain foods are acceptable among his friends and others may not be acceptable. He

may find different food patterns due to differences in cultural food habits. A child is likely to refuse a food at home if it is not accepted among his peer group. At the same time, the school-age child is more willing to try new foods within his group that he would not try alone.

BREAKFAST—NEVER TO BE SKIPPED

Most school children are in a hurry and do not like to take time for meals. Breakfast, especially, is often skipped, or if eaten, is an entirely inadequate meal. It is best if the child has a fairly routine schedule for meals.

Breakfast is often considered the most important meal of the day. Breakfast really means "breaking a fast" as the body has been without food for 12 hours or more. Studies have been conducted on the effect of breakfast on school-age children. These studies indicate that children who eat breakfast make sharper decisions, become less tired and work and play longer than children who omit breakfast. Children perform better in school if they eat a good breakfast.

A good breakfast furnishes about 1/4 of the day's intake of calories and nutrients. It should contain a source of vitamin C (citrus fruit), a protein food, milk and sufficient other food to supply energy. Thus, a glass of juice, bacon or egg, milk and cereal or toast would constitute a good breakfast for a school-age child.

THE HEALTHIEST AGE

School age is generally considered to be the healthiest time of life. School children have relatively few dislikes for food except possibly vegetables. These are usually not eaten in sufficient amounts. School-age children usually have good appetites, especially after age 10 when they begin to grow more rapidly.

Parents should serve as examples of good eating habits as schoolage children still look to adults for guidance. Food habits are being formed during these years that will last throughout life.